

Wanted: White Ribbon

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December 21, 2011



Someone near metro Universitet is currently cutting up 16.2 kilometers of white ribbon and needs some help. It takes a long time, there are three shifts tomorrow, but it has to be done by Saturday.

A number have already offered to bring scissors to club Masterskaya tomorrow evening to help out. They will cut up the ribbon during a planning meeting for the protest on Prospekt Sakharova, which is expected to attract tens of thousands of people.

The planning has been different from any protest that has ever taken place in Russia before, as you can see things being done online in a deliberately open way. This can sometimes mean watching often disharmonious committee meetings translated live on the web that have the committed watcher wanting to bang heads together. More than one person has been reminded of a certain scene in "Life of Brian" as the squabbles intensify.

But elsewhere you can see people gathering volunteers to put up posters to advertise the event, volunteers offering to work on the day itself and to raise money to pay for the event, followed by generally helpful comments and discussion.

Who will speak at the meeting? Voters decide. Tens of possible speakers, including singer Zemfira and the rarely heard writer Viktor Pelevin were offered up and had been whittled down to 10 by Wednesday in a public vote.

Zemfira, one hopes, will sing instead, especially as one of her most famous songs, "You have AIDS, that means we are going to die," would have a special meaning after Prime Minister Vladimir Putin's joke that the white ribbons were condoms for an anti-AIDS meeting.

To follow what has been happening, try the twitter account @WakeUpR, which has been perkily tweeting info and appeals for the event.

Separately, people are preparing banners for the meeting all over town, as with the Bolotnaya protests, and organizers have announced a competition for the best one. You can go on the Bolshoi Gorod site, plug in the words you want to put on a banner and have it printed out in a fairly decent style in about 20 seconds.

Anyone planning to go will, considering the fact that the temperature is forecast to be minus 8 degrees Celsius, know from @WakeUpR that police have given permission for thermoses to be brought to the protest.

This decision was welcomed by many on an appropriate Facebook page, even if it did result in the comments spiraling out of control as a few panicked that this meant police would not search properly for other kinds of metal objects, cue sinister music, conspiracies, while others suggested, only some facetiously, that everyone should go the whole hog, bring some kielbasa, sandwiches, blankets and have a real picnic.

Original url: <https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2011/12/21/wanted-white-ribbon-a11586>